

1.15.08: Lt. Governor Addresses the 2008 GetREAL Career Technical Education Summit

"Building a Workforce for the 21st Century" Lt. Governor John Garamendi's Prepared Remarks GetREAL 2008 Career Technical Education Summit

Sacramento- Thank you. It is an honor to be here and to have the opportunity to talk to you today about the critical issues facing our state and how I believe we can—indeed, we must—work together to begin to restore the promise of California for all our people.

The grim budget proposal released last week was enough to shake us all to our core.

But we cannot afford to let crisis breed paralysis while we wait for better economic days. This is a crisis that must be met with action.

There is no question that California is at a crossroads. We know we can no longer paper over the fiscal challenges that confront state and local governments. But in surmounting those challenges we must remain faithful to two principles that have made California the Golden State.

First, prosperity is built not on hope or luck, but on prudent investment in the economic and educational infrastructure of our state.

Second, prosperity is not a lottery. Prosperity grows and endures only if it is shared. We undercut our state's long-term prosperity when we think a choice has to be made between fiscal responsibility and moral responsibility. That's a false conflict. We literally cannot afford to meet a budget crisis by abandoning our responsibility to protect the most vulnerable. Government must work for everybody if, in the long run, it is to work at all.

There is no question that our state's chronic structural imbalance calls on us to carefully examine our budgeting priorities, remembering that the success of the Golden State over the past half century was based on an innovative private sector matched by a public commitment to California's physical and intellectual infrastructure which propelled us into the leadership of the 21st century.

This budget will undoubtedly test our resolve—but when tested, California has always emerged stronger.

Over the next six months, we face a critical decision—whether to continue to invest in our future or to abandon the historical commitment to public investment that made the Golden State the engine of prosperity that it is today.

We know the physical capacity California will need—bridges, highways, aqueducts and so forth, but in this recipe for future success, there is one key ingredient on which all else hinges. Whether we succeed or fail, whether we continue to lead the nation and the world economically or let others pass us by, depends critically and fundamentally on our willingness to invest in our intellectual resources. We cannot let the price of budget stagnation in Sacramento be the intellectual capital that is our ticket to future economic and social success.

Now let me tie these general thoughts on what our priorities should be in the midst of the current budget crisis to the subject that brings us together today: Career Technical Education. Our intellectual capital is the sum total of all the human potential of all Californians. My commitment to education is a commitment to the education of all -- so that they can compete in and benefit from an increasingly knowledge-based world economy.

We are currently failing in that task.

All projections indicate that the State's economy will continue to demand more skilled and highly educated workers in the next two decades. Nonetheless, a series of recent reports have been released by the Public Policy Institute of California and the California Post Secondary Education Commission highlighting an existing and rapidly growing shortage of workers qualified to fill the increasingly complex and technical jobs that exist and will continue to develop in California.

By 2014 we will have 6.5 million job openings in our State, some of which include:

- 188,000 construction jobs
- 177,000 manufacturing jobs
- 50,000 automotive repair jobs

While there is a shortage of workers needed for the economy, we are experiencing high dropout rates and low proficiency scores in our schools. Roughly one in three of all ninth graders who enter high school disappear from the system before earning a diploma. But they don't disappear from the state. Their loss of human potential is also our loss of a vital economic resource, and all too often an expense for our society.

We must do better! And as Chair of the Commission for Economic Development, I pledge to you that we will. Our Commission will focus on building a sustainable growth economy which will require the expansion of Career Technical Education in our schools and community colleges.

We must take a critical look at how we integrate career technical education into our overall investment in the educated workforce we need for a high-tech economy. While continuing to encourage our young people to pursue the undergraduate degrees that we know will enrich them individually and the state collectively, we must leave no mind behind. Higher education and Career Technical Education must be available to all.

We in government must work with our academic and business leaders to develop plans to increase the capacity and availability of career technical programs that provide training for important, high-skill occupations that meet the needs of businesses and provide good jobs for our people.

And we must work together to ensure that GetREAL's ultimate goal is met: getting young people into good jobs that will sustain them, their families, and our economy.

It will take clear vision and careful strategy to make CTE an integral part of California's education curriculum. Here are a few first steps.

For starters, we must make sure that a doorway to opportunity does not function as a trapdoor to second-class educational status. That means that a CTE curriculum must not operate as a tracking system which constrains and stigmatizes high school students who choose to pursue it. It is imperative that CTE students who have the capacity to seek and attain an undergraduate degree be offered high school courses that allow the student to move on to a bachelor degree. This does not mean that every CTE course should meet the University of California's curricular requirements—the so-called "A through G" courses—but it does mean that there should be a path that can be followed and that some of the CTE courses do qualify.

A comprehensive state policy on providing and encouraging our youth to pursue career technical education would open the door of opportunity to all who wish to contribute to this great state. And as all of you in GetREAL know, it would be good for business, too.

Next, we must be committed to streamlining the complex governance of CTE—by better coordinating the programs at Community Colleges, ROP, K-12, work force investment programs, job training, CSU, UC systems, and our private training schools. Is there a person in this room who can diagram the flow of money and assign responsibility for our students' success? If CTE is to succeed and be adequately funded then this mish-mash of overlapping and confusing responsibilities and funding must be clarified. We must strive for an efficient and effective CTE program with clear lines of responsibility and authority.

Third: Is this the Get REAL conference? Then all of us had better get real and here is a dose of reality: You surely have heard that famous movie line: "Show me the money";.

CTE programs largely escaped the budget axe last week, but with a continued negative economic outlook and an unwillingness to raise revenues, no program will be immune in the future. You and I know all too well, that unless we have the political courage and will to fund CTE, we will be left only with good intentions.

You are all seasoned political observers and you know that without revenue enhancements—i.e. reform of our tax system or a massive participation by employers—we will never have the money to fund CTE. So we had all better Get REAL if we believe CTE is important.

I want all of California's young people to dream of a better future, and to pursue their dreams. I want young men and women to find excitement and curiosity in their studies. For some it maybe an algebra equation, for others it may be figuring out the angles on a staircase. Either way, it is through their desire and hunger to learn that they will find their path.

I want California's entrepreneurs and researchers to continue their unrelenting pursuit of innovation, and to continue to attract to California the world's venture capital so that the new innovation- and information-based economy remains here on the east coast of the vast economic engine we know as the Pacific Rim.

I'm not ready to let the California dream fade away. I think that if we make the right choices now, when the skies are dark, we'll have sunny days again, and a brighter future for the long term.

I hope you will join with me. None of us can rebuild California on our own. But working together, inspired by California's past and committed to its future, we can and must prevail. Our children's future is in our hands. We must not let them down.